

A Prophet of the New Year

Copyright, 1904, by C. E. Smith.

The smart set is interested just now in the approaching visit of the Earl and Countess of Gorton. The countess was Miss Edith Temple of Philadelphia and is a great beauty. The earl himself has some reputation for looks, having been called the handsomest man in English society, but his chief claim to distinction is as a prophet. He first won this fame by a supernaturally accurate prediction of the Spanish-American war, in which, among other wonders, he foretold the date of the naval battle of Santiago within one day.

THIS paragraph has appeared in many papers of late, and in fancy I can see the noble earl reading it and gnashing his teeth. In private he disclaims all credit (or discredit) for the Spanish-American bullseye shot, and justly, too, as I shall show; yet even in England, where the facts should be well known, his name perpetually calls up the memory of that miraculous feat. When I knew this man he was plain George Lawrence, with no reasonable expectation of a title. Expectation of money he did indeed have, and he might have lived in luxury by discounting his prospects.

Indeed, his cousin, Arthur Lawrence, a man of means and of growing political importance, would have advanced him any reasonable sum without interest, but the most that George would ever accept from him was a corner of the library in his residence. This was screened off as George's workshop, and there he wrote ponderous articles which were quite readily taken by newspapers and magazines, but the prices were so meager and George's method of work was so distressingly slow that he earned only a bare living.

The Lawrence house was a likely place to meet smart Americans sojourning in London, and many of the better sort, too, the people of real consequence in the world, for Mrs. Lawrence, though of English birth, had spent her girlhood in Philadelphia. Thus it happened that when some of the Philadelphia Temples were in Lon-

"It is true," said he, "that I had not intended to tell you. Nevertheless I will do so."

She would have assured him that it was not necessary, but he had already thrust his hand into the pile of manuscripts, newspapers and loose sheets upon his desk and had found a clipping which he gave to Miss Temple.

"Oh, I've seen this!" she cried after a hasty glance. "This paper offers a prize of 200 guineas for the best forecast of the year. I do hope you'll win



HE WROTE Ponderous ARTICLES.

It. But it's such a terribly long time to wait. The predictions will lie in a safe a whole year, and even after they are opened it will probably take your slow English editors a year more to decide which is the best. I shouldn't have the patience."

"They'll not be so slow as that," said he. "A few weeks will suffice, I should suppose. And so in thirteen months from today I shall know my fate. A

have decided that this prize will be won by some special exercise of foresight in a particular direction. No man can write a history of the minor events of human progress a year in advance of their occurrence, but in the larger affairs which affect the destiny of the whole world a careful student should at least have an intelligent opinion. Now, the political and indeed the social fortunes of the world today undoubtedly depend chiefly upon two nations—England and Russia. Of course we will admit that Germany may—"

"Now, George," interrupted Miss Temple, raising her finger, "I haven't given months to the study of this question, but I know what is the greatest nation in the world, and if you're looking for something to happen, look westward!"

Lawrence put the tips of his fingers together with an air of wisdom. "The United States are great," he said, "but they are still in the egg, so to speak. They will develop—some day, though whether, as a democracy they can ever become a world power I am very much in doubt. In the first place, they are a commercial and not a warlike people."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Miss Temple. "That's a nice thing for an Englishman to say!"

"Of course," he said blandly, "there is at present some small friction with Spain over the Cuban question—"

"With Spain!" she cried. "I could laugh. Just give me a pad and I'll write a prophecy for you, telling what we'll do to Spain."

She seized a pad from the desk. "When do you think this war will break out?" he asked, smiling.

"Well, the 19th of April is a pretty good day," said she, with a sudden memory of Lexington, "and it might wind up on the Fourth of July."

"The Spanish invasion!" he began, with a laugh.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "They'll

An Aging Maid to New Year:



FIGHT summers long have dragged since I
Let slip my leap year right of wooing;
As brightens now the New Year sky
I hasten to be up and doing.
A bashful lass in ninety-six,
Adored by bashful beaux a-plenty,
I would not in the man hunt mix,
For, pshaw, methought, I'm only twenty!

I could, perchance, at twenty-four
Have offered heart and hand to any,
But nineteen hundred barred the door
Of leap year privilege to Fanny.

Not in a hundred years before
Had Eve's poor daughters thus been cheated;
Not till they count two hundred more
Can like defrauding be repeated.

Oh, what a most unlucky year
That saw my baby eyes a-blinking!
But vain the moan and weak the tear,
And foolish all this bitter thinking!

Let me be brave! The proverb says
In words designed for maids unhappy,
Like me, accursed with weight of days,
That faint heart never won a chappie.

My curling tongs and powder puff,
My ribbons, lace and like delusions
Should be artillery enough
With Luck today to try conclusions.

Then, be he young or somewhat gray
(In charms I'm sure that I shall match him),
The bachelor first seen today—
I think perhaps I'll try to catch him.

Be stern, my heart, and fear to spare!
In firmness let not steel outrank you.
Let him escape us? Let him dare!
My candid looking glass, I thank you.

P. J. TANSEY.

THE ORIGIN OF NEW YEAR'S DAY

New Year's day as a holiday was invented, like so many other lasting institutions, by the patricians of ancient Rome. Though its significance has changed, its customs remain practically what they were before imperial Caesar died and turned to clay. Noble Romans on the 1st day of January in the year 1 A. D. arrayed themselves in clean shirts and togas and sallied forth to greet their Julias and Calpurnias with as much assurance as the young American of the last decade, in high hat and frock coat, started on his round of New Year's calls.

The Romans, too, had their clubs and on New Year's day their side-

of Romulus, but it was not until the reformation of the calendar by Julius Caesar that Jan. 1 became the fixed date of this event. On this day the priests sacrificed to Janus on twelve altars, from which sacrifices they drew prognostications for the ensuing twelve months. The practices of exchanging gifts and visits and almost all the New Year's day customs as we know them were gradually incorporated into the feast of Janus and Strenia.

The sacred mistletoe, used by us as a Christmas decoration and as an excuse for amenities not permitted at other seasons, was a contribution of the Druids to the Roman New Year festival.

With the fall of the Roman empire and the subsequent dissemination of Roman customs throughout Europe by the barbarian conquerors New Year's day came to be universally observed, different tribes adding to or subtracting from the accessories to make them accord with their own mythology.

In the middle ages, particularly after the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, the church began to shape the general observance of the day until now it is a distinctly Christian holiday.

A. W. FERRIN.

Johnny's Resolve.

He was dining at the home of his best girl on New Year's day, and everything might have passed off all right if he hadn't said to her little brother:

"Well, Johnny, did you make some good resolutions today?"
"Yes, sir," replied the boy. "I asked sister to tell me of a good resolution to make, and she said if I'd resolve to keep out of the parlor tonight for about five minutes she'd make you propose or know the reason why."

ONE OF THE SURPRISES OF THE GLAD NEW YEAR

THE new year comes,
The old year goes,
'Tis leap year once again.
Ah me," said she,
"Should girls propose
Or wait to hear from men?"



"WILL you be mine?"
He said with eyes
That gave her heart a thrill.
"Ah me," said she,
In great surprise,
"This is SO SUDDEN, Will!"

THE VERY BEST HE COULD DO

The bookkeeper was worried. New Year's day had come and gone, and yet the struggling and ambitious young man had not been patted on the back and told that his salary was to be advanced several hundred dollars.

He couldn't make it out. Something must be wrong. Perhaps he had been overlooked.

Believing such to be the case, he posted himself where the head of the firm could not and did not fail to see



"TAKE IT, MY BOY."

him when he entered the building one morning, and George's hair curled with pleasure when he was summoned to the office ten minutes later.

"We have entered upon a new year, George," began the senior partner.

"We have, sir," was the hesitating reply.

"During the past year I have noticed your diligence and attention to business, George."

"Yes, sir."

"And I am going to do something for you. It is not as much as I could wish, but just now it is the best I can do. I know you will appreciate it."

"I—I will, sir."

"Here, George, are the papers transferring my interest in this house to you from this date, and on your part you agree to pay me the weekly salary you are now receiving. Take it, my boy, and pay the debts, and do the worrying, and run behind every year, and put in your time for nothing, and may heaven have mercy on your soul!"

A. B. LEWIS.

Tommy's New Year's Resolution.
Just before the school closed for the holidays the teacher urged her pupils to make at least one good resolution for the year 1904. As she finished her remarks a boy in the front seat raised his hand.

"Well, Tommy," said the teacher, "I'm glad you are going to make a good resolution. What is it, my boy?"

"Please, teacher," he replied, "I ain't goin' to hit no boy in 1904 that's bigger 'n me."

Wenry Willie in 1904.
Wenry Willie—I've just made t'ree resolutions fur 1904, an' I'm goin' to keep every one of dem.

Wayworn Watson—Ye ain't resolved to go to work, hev ye, Bill?

Wenry Willie—No, Watson. My resolutions are dese: In 1904 I ain't goin' to drink champagne, take milk baths or put up w' de Waldorf-Castoria when I'm in New York.



HE WATCHED HER WITH AMUSEMENT AS SHE SCRIBBLED HER WAR PROPHECY.

don they were very much at home at the Lawrence residence, and George fell in love with Edith Temple.

It was a hasty act for George. A month after their first meeting a man with only half an eye might have seen that Miss Temple was very much in love with George, and, as she had plenty of money to carry them along until his own inheritance should fall in, it was foolish of them to waste their time. But George was incapable of imagining dependence upon any other purse than his own, and so he had no choice, but must wait for the family fortune, which was fixed for life in the grip of an old uncle.

Matters were in this state on the last day of the year 1897. It was afternoon, and George was at work in his accustomed place when he was interrupted by a tapping on the screen. George knew who was there even before she touched the screen with her gloved fingers. He had felt her approach while she was traversing all the length of the library.

George had a way of sliding farther and farther under his desk while he was at work, and his chair and his legs would often be so entangled in reference books which he had been using that he required several minutes to free himself.

Herein lies the reason why Miss Temple stood beside George while he was still making cautious attempts to rise and receive her. He humbly begged her pardon, and she gave him her hand to kiss in token of forgiveness. And at that moment she saw a page before him on which he had written several memoranda, each bearing a number. She did not catch the import of any of them.

"What are those things, George?" she asked. "Good resolutions for the new year?"

He smiled somewhat mysteriously. "The essential of every good resolution is foresight," said he. "So many of us justify ourselves against temptations which are highly improbable and then are ensnared by others which, though of the commonest sort, we have neglected to anticipate."

"Speaking of temptation, I asked you what you were writing, and if you have any temptation to tell me you're resisting it nobly."

careful consideration of my prospects leads me to anticipate that I shall need 200 guineas just as badly a year hence as I do now. I really hope to win this prize. I fancy that most of the competitors will be women—it is usually so—and, pardon me for mentioning it, women always guess. They rarely arrive at a conclusion as the result of methodical reasoning."

"That never worries me," she retorted, "so long as I arrive. That's the



I CONGRATULATED GEORGE.

important point. However, let me hear what you have arrived at as the result of methodical reasoning."

He took up his page of memoranda and ran his eye along the headings.

"I began early," he said, "and despite the interruptions of my regular work I have kept the matter more or less in mind down to this very last day of the contest. The sealed prophecy, as you are aware, must be sent in before midnight. It must bear a catchword on the outside of the larger envelope, and within there must be a smaller envelope with the real name of the competitor. I have already prepared my envelopes."

And he held them up.

"Now," he continued, "after months of the most careful consideration I

never get ashore. We shall sink all their ships in the Atlantic ocean."

"Some of them are in the Pacific," he objected.

"We'll leave them there!" she cried. "We'll sink them first. We'll sink them on the 19th of April and the others on the Fourth of July."

"You can get their names from this," he said, taking down a naval annual, and he watched her with great amusement as she scribbled her fiery war prophecy.

They had great fun reading it when it was done. Miss Temple very cleverly expressed it in an excellent parody of George's ponderous and careful style, and she felt rather proud of her work as a literary effort.

Three days later Miss Temple again visited George in his "workshop." She found him standing like a statue, staring at a bit of manuscript as if he intended to eat it.

"What is that, George?" she inquired.

He passed his hand nervously over his forehead; then he suddenly began to paw furiously over the papers on his desk.

"Miss Temple," he said at last, "this is my prophecy. There—there is but one possible explanation of this—this amazing phenomenon. Yours is missing. We have put it into that envelope instead of mine."

"You don't mean that you've sent it?" she almost screamed. "That ridiculous nonsense! Oh, how utterly absurd! And your name is with it! George, what can I ever do to atone for this?"

There is no doubt that this terrible calamity brought them nearer together and greatly hastened their engagement, which was announced about a month later. I had the pleasure of congratulating George, but I left England soon after, and so missed the great delight of being with him during the time when the course of his story was making a prophet of him. The publication of his prophecy a year later made a tremendous sensation, and no amount of explanation from him could destroy his sudden and unearned reputation. As for the prize, he bestowed it in charity, which he could afford to do, for by that time he had come into his inheritance.

EVERETT HOLBROOK.